

Wild Orchids of Victoria Australia

by Jeffrey Jeanes
and Gary Backhouse

Publisher: *Aquatics Photographics, 2006.*
315 pages, hardback; colour photographs.
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Jeanes and Backhouse have produced another striking book on indigenous orchids. Quite different from their reference book from 1995, it records in beautiful colour photographs all the currently known Victorian orchids. They have included multiple photos of most species to allow us to appreciate the amazing diversity in form and colour as well as the exquisite beauty of Victoria's orchids. As well as showcasing the orchids, the authors have provided a very simple method of identifying them in the field.

The authors' enthusiasm and dedication to their subject is obvious – 'Victoria has an orchid flora of extraordinary richness, comparable with the best in the world for its diversity of terrestrial orchids... About 40% of the species are either endemic or now restricted entirely to Victoria. It is only through increased education and awareness, accepting responsibility, protection and careful management that we can safeguard this irreplaceable asset...' Orchids can be found in many habitats, 'from coastal sand dunes to the tops of the highest mountains...and are only totally absent from saline areas'.

The stated principal aim of the book is to 'facilitate the identification of all the currently recognised orchid taxa in Victoria'. In order to identify an orchid we are directed first to find the genus to which it belongs by referring to the pictorial guide to genera at the front of the book. Here on a double page each genus is represented by a photo that directs us to a page number where the species for that genus begin.



Then by leafing through the various species and reading the text a match should be found. I think the pictorial guide is a great idea. It is very accessible, being so easy to use, and is much faster than working through a key.

Alternatively, a botanical key to the genera is provided, with a simple explanation of how to use it. Possibly the inclusion of species keys would broaden the book's appeal. I feel a little uneasy about the references in the statements at the beginning of the key to underground parts of orchids. Without a specific warning against collecting specimens without authorisation, a message might be inadvertently communicated that it is acceptable to interfere with these vulnerable plants. I think it is an oversight not to include such a warning. All Victorian native orchids are protected under the *Flora and Fauna Guarantee Act 1988* (Backhouse and Jeanes 1995). The pictorial emphasis of the book makes it accessible and appealing to people who may not yet have an awareness of the disastrous effects of digging up or picking orchids.

The introduction includes brief general notes on such topics as taxonomy, geography, climate and habitats, orchid form, ecology and biology, and conservation. The glossary and labelled photos, showing

labellum features and the floral parts of a number of different forms of terrestrial orchids, are both essential to the book. Not all the features are clear from the photos. Line drawings could have been more instructive in some cases. There are photographs showing nine habitats, with a list of some of the orchids that might be found in each. I think the habitat photos are a good feature, although I don't see much point in the lists. In total only about one quarter of the orchids covered in the book are listed here. I presume that those listed are the more typical for these habitats. Foothill forests and moist foothill forests are not included here but are mentioned in the text. The index is easy to use and includes both common and scientific names. Maps of Victoria on the endpapers show place names mentioned in the text.

There is a checklist, and a bibliography which together take up about 20 pages out of 315. The bulk of the book contains photos and text for 364 species, some unnamed, plus 45 named and unnamed hybrids, being all currently known taxa at the time of writing. The orchids are arranged 'according to their similarity of appearance reflecting their relationships' so that closely related taxa can be compared easily. This generally follows *The Flora of Victoria* Vol. 2 (Walsh and Entwisle 1994). The photos number 'about 1400' and are of the highest quality. Multiple photos cover most of the page and often include a number of shots of the same species to show the diversity within the species. Photographs often show orchids in their habitat with leaves sometimes shown as well. There are close-ups showing particular features, and place names are given for each photo. Someone unfamiliar with indigenous orchids might be misled by the close-ups as there is no scale. Size is referred to in the text. Although the photos are spectacular, not all of them add information. I would like to see distribution maps for each species replacing some of the photos.

For each genus there is a brief description including number of species, distribution, and general information relating to growth form and flowers and leaves. Other notes may refer to taxonomy, response to

fire, and reproduction. The derivation of the generic name is included.

The species account includes the scientific name with the taxonomic authority and one common name, but no synonyms. The description includes height, number and size of flowers, and features of the leaf 'where applicable'. Distinguishing flower features are given where they would help in identification. Flowering period, distribution, 'Broad Vegetation Type' (developed by the Department of Sustainability and Environment), conservation status, hybridisation and distinguishing features are all included. I think the conservation status should have been highlighted in some way to attract attention, especially for the rare and threatened species. At times the lack of a leaf description was frustrating to me in the species account when I was trying to identify an orchid by the leaf and bud only.

Although the authors call this book a field guide, with dimensions 28 x 21 x 3 cm (pages slightly smaller than A4) it makes a reasonably bulky book to carry in your pack. I think of field guides as being smaller and lighter. In the field it fulfils its aim. On a recent walk in Box Ironbark forest I used the book to identify a number of species. My companion using the keys of the *Flora of Victoria* came to the same conclusions.

Overall, this is a very appealing and useful book. The photos alone would attract people with no previous interest in orchids, and the pictorial guide would probably get an observant and determined beginner to the correct genus and possibly species. Quite an achievement! Readers with more knowledge would also gain pleasure and satisfaction from the book. I think the authors will achieve their aim to raise awareness of Victoria's indigenous orchids.

References

- Backhouse G and Jeanes J (1995) *The Orchids of Victoria* (The Miegunyah Press, Melbourne University Press: Melbourne)
 Walsh N and Entwisle T (eds) (1994) *The Flora of Victoria, Vol 2. Ferns and allied plants, conifers and monocotyledons.* (Inkata Press: Melbourne)

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